

Wife Urged Powers to Quit Flying

By JACK V. FOX

MILLEDGEVILLE, Ga. (UPI)—Barbara Gay Powers wanted her suitor to quit flying before she would marry him.

But Francis Powers told her she would have to take the Air Force and flying, too, if she wanted him — and she did.

The striking, dark-haired Georgia girl, now 24 but only 18 when she married, has borne up well waiting for news of the fate of U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers, now in Russian hands.

Mrs. Powers has gone into seclusion, spending part of her time here in the tiny green and white cottage of her mother, Mrs. Monteen Brown, and at the home of her married sister in Albany, Ga.

MRS. POWERS no doubt knows a great deal about her husband's high altitude flights over Russia from Adana, Turkey, where he was based. But government and Lockheed officials obviously have warned her to say absolutely nothing.

At the one news conference she held, she said her husband was not a "spy." It surprised listeners because the U.S. government has admitted Powers was making photographic espionage flights. It probably is a matter of her definition of the word.

Typical of his shyness with girls, Powers met Barbara through her mother. He was an F-84 Thunderjet pilot with the 468th Fighter Squadron of the Strategic Air Command based at Turner Air Force base outside Albany.

MRS. BROWN worked in the base cafeteria — and as he so often did with older women — the young man endeared himself to her. Mrs. Brown brought her young daughter to meet the handsome pilot from the Virginia Hills and their courtship was swift. Mrs. Powers calls her husband Gary — not Francis.

They were married in 1954. The girl didn't want any children so long as her husband was flying and they have had none. In 1956, Powers resigned his commission with the Air Force and took a job as "test pilot" with Lockheed aircraft.

He was making \$627.48 per month then as a first lieutenant. The Lockheed job paid \$1,500 a month to start. Premier Nikita Khrushchev has said Powers told Russian authorities he was making \$2,500 a month and that he was saving to buy a house.

POWERS was a top-notch fighter pilot, one of the top six in his squadron. But his record was not particularly distinguished. His only decoration was the National Defense Service Medal given to all men in service during the Korean war whether they were in combat or not. He never was.

But there was something extra about the young man that led Lockheed and the Central Intelligence Agency to assign him to one of the most dangerous and delicate of missions.

Dr. Deane Walker, the soft-spoken, scholarly president of Milligan College which Powers attended from 1946 to 1950, said that in retrospect he remembers a quality about the young man that set him aside.

"I'VE SEEN THE same trait in young men singled out for work by the Federal Bureau of Investigation," the head of the tiny Tennessee college said. "We try to instill the qualities here."

"It's a certain integrity of intellect and of character," Francis had it. He was reserved, but not withdrawn. He was the type of person you knew you could count on. Those of us here at Milligan are proud of him."

Young Powers is remembered by one of his college classmates, Claude Calloway of Gastonia, N.C., as a kind of bug on physical fitness.

His grades at Milligan were not outstanding — roughly a "strong" B average. They were not, in fact, good enough for him to be advised to go on to medical school as his father had hoped. Instead, he returned to the home in Pound, Va., and enlisted in the Air Force.

Stationed at Westover Field in Massachusetts, the young man was taken along "for the ride" with officers at the base putting in their flying time. His love of flying was re-awakened and, after a year in which he became a corporal, Powers put in for flight training with the Air Force.

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HE WENT to a school at Greenville, Miss., run by civilians for the Air Force and got his pilot's wings on Dec. 19, 1952. The biography the Air Force has issued on Powers runs a scant 200 words and covers only his routine assignments to training bases in Arizona and Georgia, plus two months non-combat service in Japan during the Korean war.

A girl at Grundy High School furnished one bit of evidence. Powers was the "class poet" on the night of graduation in 1946 and she still has the poem that Francis wrote and read. Here is how it goes:

"WE'RE PARTING tonight from the friends of our youth, We part from the school that our valor inspired.

"It quickened our zeal and our love for the truth, And always our faint hearts to fervor it fired.

"We shall ever admire, as this moment we do,

"All the bounteous wisdom and worth of her name:

"Her children will stay to her memory true

"While deeds of devotion add light to her fame."